# Ready for a whale of a move

BY JOSEPH FRAZIER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEXICO CITY — Keiko, the captive killer whale who escaped in the movie *Free Willy*, is leaving his pool again — this time for a bigger one on the Oregon shore.

After living at the Reina Aventura (Adventure Kingdom) amusement park here for the past decade, Keiko will be moved Jan. 7 to the Oregon Coast Aquarium near Newport.

Preparations for moving the 7,000-pound mammal already are under way.

"He knows how to get onto the sling that will lift him up," said Renata Hernandez, 33, who has been one of his trainers for five years. She said his diet had been increased from 110 to 175 pounds of fish a day to help him adjust to the lower water temperature in Oregon.

The amusement park is donating the 15-year-old whale to the Free Willy Keiko Foundation of San Francisco, which has arranged with the Oregon aquarium to take care of him. Keiko needs more room than the Mexico City amusement park can provide and is suffering from viral skin lesions that veterinarians have been unable to cure.

The foundation and the aquarium both say they hope Keiko can be returned to the wild but many doubt that will be possible.

In the movie, the whale escapes with the help of a troubled boy. Many of the scenes were shot at Reino Aventura but those in the wild used a whale robot. The robot was used exclusively in *Free Willy II*, the sequel.

Keiko will be shipped on a C-130 Hercules transport plane from Mexico City to Newport in a five-ton stainless-steel case. United Parcel Service is making the move gratis.

During the flight, Keiko will be covered with a thick cream to regulate his body temperature. Veterinarians and others will use tons of ice and water during the eight-hour flight from Mexico City to Newport to keep the temperature right.

Immersion is not necessary — Keiko breathes air just as humans do.

Warner Bros., which made the two movies, contributed $2 million to the move. Other contributors included the Northwest Elementary School in Tampa, Fla., which raised $20,000.

The entire budget for the operation is about $9 million, including building the tank and caring for Keiko in Newport for the first two years.

"After that it he cannot be released and the foundation does not have the money for his care, the aquarium *will pay for it*," said Phyllis Bell, executive director of the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

The viral infection shows up as a grayish-white scab-like area behind his right front flipper, something veterinarian Jose Luis Sobrazano says might go away by itself in the cooler sea water of his new home.

"It has been implied that Keiko is going because he has been mistreated here," he said. "But look, he not miserable. He just needs a bigger pool."

The *Free Willy* star plays with a dolphin companion in the Mexico City pool that he'll be vacating next month.


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